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12. ON THE TAXONOMIC STATUS OF THE EASTERN GHATS HILL MYNA, *GRACULA RELIGIOSA PENINSULARIS* WHISTLER AND KINNEAR, 1933 [AVES: STURNIDAE]

The Eastern Ghats population of the Hill Myna was separated from the Northern Hill Myna, *Gracula religiosa intermedia* A. Hay, 1844, by Whistler and Kinnear (1933) as *Gracula r. peninsularis* with Sambalpur district, Orissa, as the type-locality, on the basis of its being smaller in size and in having finer and shorter bill. Ripley (1961) and Ali and Ripley (1972) also accepted them as separate sub-species.

However, while working out some recent

collections of birds from Orissa made by me in 1976 and 1977, I find that my specimens of the Hill Myna are very difficult to separate from *Gracula r. intermedia*. An attempt has, therefore, been made to settle the taxonomic status of *Gracula religiosa peninsularis* on the basis of the material present at the Zoological Survey of India and the Bombay Natural History Society. The differences between the populations from Orissa and northern India are given in Table.

TABLE

MEASUREMENTS IN MM. (AVERAGES IN PARENTHESIS)

Wing	Tail	Bill	Wing-Tail Index	Wing-Bill Index
<i>Gracula religiosa intermedia</i> :				
Nepal				
1 ♂ : 170	78	31	45.88	18.23
1 ♀ : 170	79	31	46.47	18.23
Darjeeling				
3 ♂ : 16-166	71-74	31-33	43.82-45.62	18.91-20.62
(162.66)	(72.66)	(32)	(44.67)	(19.76)
3 ♀ : 168-172	78-80	34	45.34-47.05	20-20.34
(170)	(76.66)	(34)	(46.27)	(20.19)
Bhutan (Data taken from Dr. B. Biswas)				
3 ♂ : 160-165	75-79	30-31	46.87-47.87	18.18-19.37
(161.66)	(76.33)	(30.66)	(47.20)	(18.97)
3 ♀ : 158-172	72-81	32-33.5	45.56-47.64	18.82-20.88
(166.66)	(77.66)	(32.83)	(46.57)	(19.72)

## Arunachal Pradesh

2♀ : 164-168 (166)	74-75 (74.50)	31-33 (32)	44.64-45.12 (44.88)	18.90-19.64 (19.27)
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## Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya

3♂ : 161-171 (165.66)	74-77 (75.33)	34(2) (34)	45.02-45.96 (45.47)	19.88-20.60 (20.24)
1♀ : 162	78	34	48.14	20.98

## Garo Hills, Meghalaya

2♂ : 168-170 (169)	73-74 (73.50)	32-34 (33)	42.94-44.04 (43.49)	18.82-20.23 (19.52)
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## Goalpara

2♂ : 167-174 (170.50)	77-79 (78)	32-34 (33)	45.40-46.10 (45.75)	18.39-20.35 (19.37)
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Orissa population (= *Gracula religiosa peninsularis*) :

## Chahala, Mayurbhanj Dist.

2♂ : 160, 161 (160.50)	77, 78 (77.50)	30, 32 (31)	48.12, 48.44 (48.28)	18.63, 20 (19.31)
1♀ : 156	76	31	48.71	19.87

## Kotagarh, Phulbani Dist.

5♂ : 156-168 (163.20)	72-80 (75)	33-34 (33.75)	43.97-47.14 (45.85)	19.64-21.79 (20.79)
3♀ : 154-155 (154.66)	69-74 (71)	30-32 (31)	44.80-47.74 (45.89)	19.35-20.64 (20.03)

## Madpad, Koraput Dist.

5♂ : 154-169 (162.80)	74-84 (79)	32-34 (33)	42.01-48.44 (46.85)	18.93-21.42 (20.29)
4♀ : 157-162 (160)	76-80 (78)	31-33 (31.75)	46.91-50.31 (48.75)	19.13-21.01 (19.84)

## Chitrakunda, Koraput Dist.

2♂ : 154, 163 (158.50)	74, 79 (76.50)	32, 33 (32.50)	48.05, 48.46 (48.25)	20.24, 20.77 (20.50)
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## Kutri and Gonja, Puri Dist.

2♀ : 155, 160 (157.50)	75, 77 (76)	33 (33)	48.12, 48.38 (48.25)	20.62, 21.29 (20.95)
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It appears from the above data that *intermedia* and *peninsularis* cannot be separated from each other on the basis of either size or bill characters. Though *intermedia* is generally slightly larger than *peninsularis*, only about 50% and not 75% of the population can be separated, and there is complete overlap in

the size of the bill between them, and in their wing-tail and wing-bill indices. Hence, *Gracula religiosa peninsularis* should be considered a synonym of *Gracula religiosa intermedia*.

I am grateful to Dr. B. Biswas, Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta for his valuable suggestions and for going through the manuscript

and to Dr. S. D. Ripley of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C., for his wise

advice in this matter. He also agrees with my conclusion.

ZOOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA,  
INDIAN MUSEUM,  
CALCUTTA 700 016,  
January 3, 1978.

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## 13. EGG-BOUND DEATH OF A PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD AT BAJ BAJ, WEST BENGAL

The Purplerumped Sunbird, *Nectarinia zeylenica sola* (Vieillot), breeds throughout the year. However, there is marked increase in breeding activities in lower West Bengal from the early part of March to May.

Early in February this year, with the first incursion of the south wind that brings humidity from the Bay of Bengal and heralds the advent of spring in lower Bengal, I noticed a female Purplerumped Sunbird building its pouch-like pear-shaped nest which lacked the porch-like projection over the entrance, suspended from a thin branch of a Sourlime tree [*Citrus aurantiifolia* (Christm.) Swingle] at a height of c. 1.5 m from the ground at Baj Baj, 24-Parganas District, West Bengal. The nest was built entirely by the female, while her mate did the 'watch and ward' duties. She took six days for completion of the nest, from 5th

February to 11th February 1977.

The first egg of the clutch was laid on 20th February. The bird was found dead at her nest on the 22nd morning. Its head was tucked inside the wall of the nest-chamber and the lower part of the abdomen bulged out in such a way that the brood-patch was completely exposed, and the anal circlet was curved inward. The presence of a ring formed by pollen and nectar at the distal part of its bill indicated that it had its early morning feed.

On postmortem it was found that the bird died egg-bound. A thinly shelled and properly shaped egg measuring 15.6×11.7 mm was found in the distal part of the oviduct. Traces of haemorrhage in the brain and in the mouth cavity probably the effect of egg-binding were also noticed.

BAJ BAJ,  
WEST BENGAL,  
July 1, 1977.

SRIKUMAR CHATTOPADHYAY